

VZCZCXRO2823  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHDS #0418/01 0400924  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 090924Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4551  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 000418

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER  
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [KPKO](#) [KHDP](#) [MOPS](#) [ET](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: UNMEE SRSG REPORTS ETHIOPIAN-ERITREAN BORDER  
REMAINS TENSE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In a 90-minute briefing to diplomatic corps representatives on February 8, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ambassador Azouz Ennifar, reported that the situation along with the Ethiopia-Eritrea border remained "tense and volatile," due to the presence of 1,700 Eritrean troops and 12-16 tanks in Sector West of the formerly demilitarized Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). In addition, the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) had observed 12 Ethiopian tanks "in camouflaged positions" in Bure (within striking distance of the Eritrean port of Assab), but could not determine when they had been moved there. UNMEE was unable to verify recent alleged cross-border incidents, Ennifar said, adding that Ethiopia may be intentionally suppressing reports of cross-border incidents involving incursions from Eritrea, so as not to raise public concern about Ethiopia's northern border when its troops are preoccupied with Somalia. Ethiopian and Eritrean military commanders have not met with each other since July 2006, and Eritrea has refused to recognize Ambassador Ennifar as SRSG since November 2006. The UNSC's decision to downsize UNMEE from 2,300 to 1,700 troops will lead to curtailing some humanitarian activities conducted by individual contingents, but will not affect the number of UNMEE Military Observers or demining activities. Visiting Norwegian deputy FM underscored the need for active engagement of both parties, prior to the November 2007 deadline for demarcation by coordinates announced by the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Many changes had occurred over the 16 months since Eritrea's imposition of a flight ban on UNMEE in October 2005, Ennifar said, recalling that Eritrea had subsequently expelled 170 international staff and increased restrictions on those remaining. There was peace and respect for the ceasefire, but a deadlock in demarcation of the border. UNSCR 1741, adopted in January 2007, had therefore called for downsizing UNMEE, as well as having Eritrea lift restrictions imposed on UNMEE and on the SRSG. Ennifar highlighted that OP 9 of UNSCR 1741 called for efforts to normalize relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, "without prejudice" to border demarcation. However, for Eritrea, demarcation appeared to be a precondition for normalization talks, he said.

-----  
MILITARY SITUATION: "TENSE AND VOLATILE"  
-----

13. (SBU) Ennifar assessed that neither party voluntarily sought war, and noted that recent public statements by Eritrea's President Isaias now emphasized "legality" rather than threats to take unilateral action. However, citing the presence of 1,700 Eritrean troops and 16 tanks in Sector West of the formerly demilitarized Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), Ennifar said their proximity (coupled with recent alleged cross-border incidents) indicated possible future instability. Opposing forces previously 25km apart now faced each other: Eritrean tanks at Om Hajer were now only 200m from the Ethiopian town of Humera; and, since October, Eritrean forces had controlled the sole bridge linking the two towns, denying passage to an UNMEE contingent split between them. The most recent UN SYG report (S/2007/33 of January 22) thus characterized the situation as "tense and volatile," he said.

-----  
ETHIOPIAN TANKS ACROSS FROM PORT OF ASSAB  
-----

14. (SBU) Whereas UNMEE previously had relied on eight helicopters, Eritrea's continued flight ban on UNMEE hampered UNMEE's ability to monitor the TSZ, especially Sector East, Ennifar said, where areas 150-200km beyond Bure remained inaccessible. In recent days, UNMEE had observed 12 Ethiopian tanks "in camouflaged positions" in Bure, but could not determine when they had been moved there.

-----  
ERITREAN TROOPS IN "DEFENSIVE POSITIONS"  
-----

ADDIS ABAB 00000418 002 OF 004

15. (SBU) While expressing concern about the increasing number of Eritrean troops in Sectors West and Center of the TSZ, Ennifar said UNMEE assessed they were in "defensive positions." Aged 20-22 years old, the Eritrean forces were assessed to be army troops, not older militia, but often carried multiple identification indicating they were police, militia, and Eritrean Defense Forces. When challenged by UNMEE MILOBs to present identification, the suspected troops often demanded to see UNMEE peacekeepers' identification, to determine whether they belonged to western nationalities that Eritrea had expelled, Ennifar said.

16. (SBU) Movements of Eritrean troops were difficult to monitor, due to Eritrean restrictions on UNMEE's freedom of movement, Ennifar said. Citing Eritrean harassment of UNMEE peacekeepers, including an incident in which peacekeepers were temporarily held at gunpoint and their vehicle impounded, he noted that UNMEE's Chapter VI mandate rendered resistance futile.

-----  
ETHIOPIA DOWNPLAYING TENSIONS WITH ERITREA  
-----

17. (SBU) UNMEE had been unable to verify recent alleged cross-border incidents, Ennifar explained, due to contradictory statements by Ethiopian and Eritrean authorities. For example, Ethiopian officials had denied that Eritrean forces had crossed the TSZ and fired at them, despite reports to the contrary. Ennifar postulated that whereas Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles had publicly cited the threat of 10,000 Eritrean troops in the TSZ during a November 2006 address to parliament, Ethiopia intentionally sought to downplay tensions with Eritrea (and suppress reports of cross-border incidents) so as not to raise public concern when Ethiopian troops were preoccupied with Somalia, in December 2006.

-----  
ETHIOPIA-ERITREA MEETINGS SUSPENDED SINCE JULY  
-----

¶18. (SBU) Meetings between Ethiopian and Eritrean military commanders, chaired by UNMEE under the auspices of the Military Coordination Committee (MCC), had been suspended since July 29, 2006, when both parties last met in Nairobi, Ennifar said. As Eritrea had cited the expense of meeting in Nairobi, Ethiopia had proposed alternating between Addis Ababa and Asmara. Rejecting meetings in capitals, Eritrea counter-proposed meeting at the border, but Ethiopia had objected. UNMEE proposals to meet in Sanaa, Djibouti, Khartoum, or Dubai had also been rejected. Ethiopia had then protested that the October 16, 2006, introduction of Eritrea troops and tanks into the TSZ had violated the sanctity of the TSZ, and that MCC meetings were not possible so long as Eritrean tanks remained in the TSZ. Eritrea had also decided to suspend participation in the MCC, Ennifar said.

¶19. (SBU) Questioned about UNMEE's interaction with Eritrean officials, Ennifar said the Force Commander and Asmara-based Deputy SRSG met regularly with Eritrea's Commissioner to discuss operational details, but that raising political developments was limited to Amb. Girma, of the Eritrean MFA's North America and International Organizations department. Ennifar noted that, ironically, Girma had been a former roommate of Ethiopia State Minister of Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu, and had been one of Ethiopia's foremost soccer players, prior to Eritrea's independence.

-----  
GSE FAILS TO RECOGNIZE SRSG  
-----

¶10. (SBU) Discussing Eritrea's refusal to recognize him as SRSG since November 2006, Ennifar explained that he had been proposed as SRSG in May 2006, two weeks after Ethiopia had rejected the previous candidate to replace outgoing SRSG Legwaila. Following Eritrea's subsequent refusal to approve Ennifar as SRSG, he was appointed interim "acting" SRSG. However, Eritrea had informed Ennifar in November 2006 that

ADDIS ABAB 00000418 003 OF 004

he would no longer be recognized as a member of UNMEE, and protested Ennifar's attendance of meetings at The Hague. Eritrea had subsequently protested UNSCR 1741's call to lift restrictions on the SRSG, via a February 1, 2007, letter to the UN SYG and the UNSC President. Ennifar noted that Eritrea had stated that it found the January 2007 UN SYG's report "unbalanced"--despite the report's explicit reference to Ethiopia's failure to observe the final and binding decision of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC).

¶11. (SBU) Ennifar noted that with the exception of visits to Libya and Cairo, Isaias had little interaction with the international community; until his farewell call, previous SRSG Ambassador Legwaila had not seen Isaias for three years. Italian PM Prodi had characterized President Isaias's trip two months earlier to Italy as "difficult," Ennifar said. He said he had not received a readout of EC Development Commissioner Louis Michel's recent meeting with Isaias in Asmara.

¶12. (SBU) Visiting Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Jonas Store stressed the importance on engaging both parties, particularly as MCC meetings had been suspended, and the United States had "stopped its initiative." He advocated stronger engagement by UN Headquarters, and the need for prompt action prior to July.

-----  
UNMEE'S FUTURE: END IN NOVEMBER 2007?  
-----

¶13. (SBU) Questioned by the French Ambassador about the EEBC's recent decision to declare the boundary demarcated by coordinates, if not by physically pillar, Ennifar responded

that the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) regarded the EEBC as an independent body. Since April 2002, the EEBC had stated it could not wait forever for physical demarcation. However, a decision to demarcate could only be taken by the two parties. Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum had protested the EEBC's announcement of demarcation by coordinates; Eritrea had also rejected it. Whether UNMEE had any reason to remain in place after the EEBC's November 2007 deadline would be a political decision of the UNSC, Ennifar said.

¶14. (SBU) Asked by Algerian poloff about the parties' reactions to the most recent UN SYG report, Ennifar responded that Ethiopia likely wanted UNMEE to remain, noting that prior to the latest UNSCR, Ethiopian PM Meles had called for the UNSC to convince Eritrea to withdraw troops from the TSZ. Eritrea had consistently asserted it was indifferent to UNMEE's size and composition, Ennifar said.

-----  
DOWNSIZING TO AFFECT HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES  
-----

¶15. (SBU) Reviewing UNMEE's mandate, Ennifar noted that the UNSC had cut UNMEE's force strength by nearly one-half: from a high of 4,000, UNMEE had been reduced from 3,200 to 2,300 in May 2006; and most recently to 1,700 in January 2007, through the adoption of UNSCR 1741. Troop contingents, not the 230 military observers (MILOBs), would be downsized. February 7 consultations with the UNMEE Force Commander had resulted in the decision to cut 200 troops each from the Indian and Jordanian contingents (currently at 850 and 750 troops, respectively) by mid-March, when rotations postponed from January would occur. The Force Commander was committed to maintaining existing military group and team sites, Ennifar added.

¶16. (SBU) Downsizing would affect some humanitarian activities conducted by UNMEE, Ennifar said, including road construction by Indian and Bangladeshi engineers, and "quick impact" medical and veterinary projects. Eritrean restrictions (such as suspending the Indians' distribution of medicine) had already made such projects difficult to implement and monitor, he added. UNMEE had no independent budget for continuing humanitarian activities conducted by

ADDIS ABAB 00000418 004 OF 004

individual contingents, he added.

¶17. (SBU) Demining, currently conducted by MACC contractors in limited areas, would not be affected by downsizing, Ennifar said. He noted that new landmines had been placed in Sector Center of the TSZ and near Badme; civilian vehicles had struck several mines recently.

¶18. (SBU) COMMENT: SRSR Ennifar's observations on Eritrea, made in a separate meeting with U.S. officials, will be reported septel. END COMMENT.  
YAMAMOTO